

Cost of Living Task Group Feedback Survey Results

November 2023



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Summary Highlights

- **76% of Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) are experiencing challenges with volunteer recruitment.**
- 'Fewer people coming forward to volunteer' (66%) and 'People have less time to volunteer' (59%) are specific challenges faced by the highest proportion of VIOs. Other challenges relate to the Health & Wellbeing of volunteers and challenges related to Finance and Staffing.
- 31% of VIOs are finding it harder to recruit young people to volunteer. VIOs are also finding it harder to recruit from; ethnic minority groups (22%), deprived communities (19%), rural areas (18%), older age groups (17%) and working age groups (17%).
- The highest proportion of VIOs reporting recruitment challenges, are amongst those in the areas of 'Health, disability and wellbeing' (43%); 'Local community or neighbourhood' (31%); 'Youth or children's activities outside school' (21%); and in 'Groups aimed at supporting older people' (20%).
- Proportionally more VIOs are experiencing volunteer recruitment issues within the following roles: 'Generally helping out as required' (18%); 'Acting as a committee member or trustee' (17%); and 'Visiting, buddying or befriending' (13%).
- **Volunteer retention issues are impacting 61% of VIOs.**
- 27% of VIOs report having fewer volunteers than 12 months ago.
- Six percent of VIOs have been asked to replace roles or tasks of paid staff with volunteers, a further 17% have not been asked but possibly will in the future.

1. Methodology

The cost-of-living crisis is having a negative affect on volunteers and volunteering involving organisations. In order to identify areas most impacted, Volunteer Scotland undertook a short survey.

The survey, co-produced with the Cost of Living Crisis Task Group (a [working group from the Volunteering Action Plan](#)), was aimed at:

- Organisations or groups that currently engage volunteers in any part of their service or function (or that has done so in the past year).
- Organisations or groups that have had to pause any part of their volunteering programme due to the cost-of-living crisis.
- Organisations or groups that have been able to continue to support volunteers.

Responses will be used to inform the development of a national 'Volunteer Recruitment Campaign'.

The online survey, which ran between the 26th of October and the 15th of November, received 310 responses; 289 of which were from organisations currently engaging volunteers. The survey is a snapshot of Volunteer Involving Organisations' (VIOs) experiences of the cost-of-living crisis. Organisations were not asked to provide classification information such as income. As no classification questions were asked, the data is not weighted to be representative of the organisational characteristics of the sector.

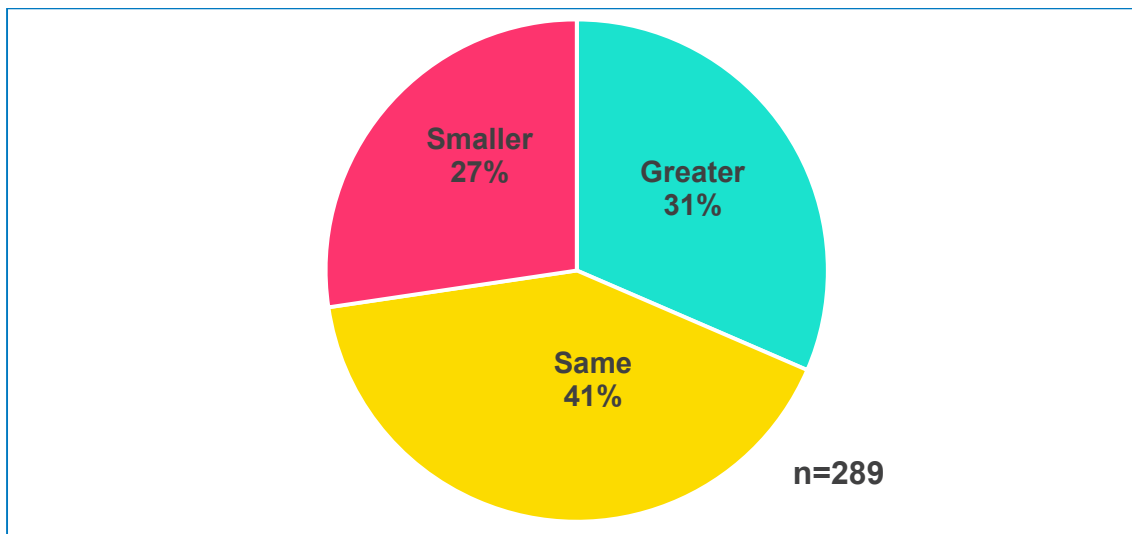
The data reported reflect the views of the 289 volunteer involving organisations responding to this survey. Several questions allow for multiple responses; these questions sum to over 100%.

2. Findings

2.1 Change in volunteer numbers from a year ago

27% of Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) report a smaller number of volunteers actively engaged with their organisation than a year ago. 31% of VIOs have a greater number and 41% have the same volunteer numbers.

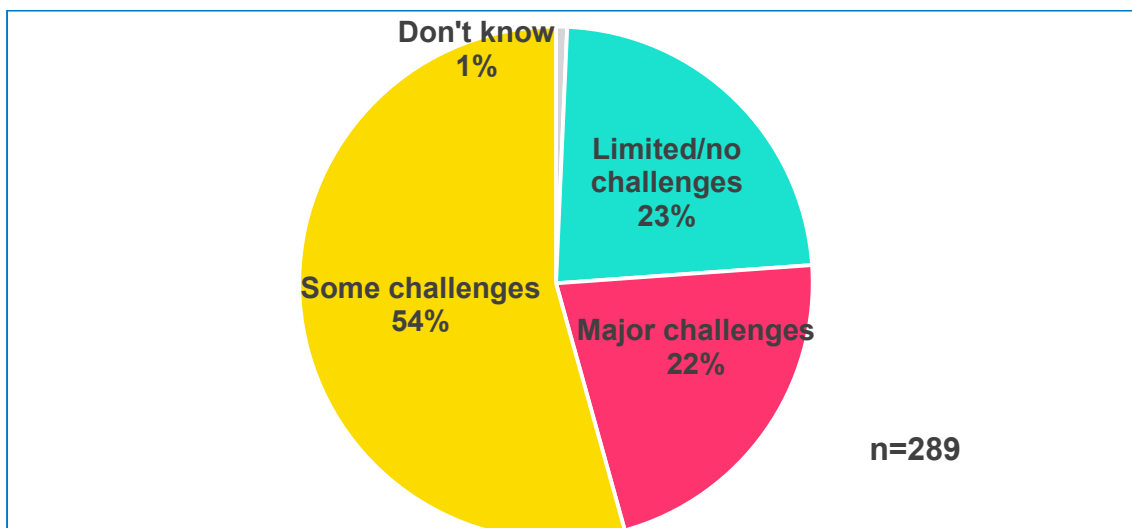
Q - Compared with a year ago, is the number of volunteers actively engaged with your organisation greater, about the same, or smaller?



2.2 Volunteer recruitment

76% of VIOs are experiencing challenges with volunteer recruitment; 22% major challenges and 54% some challenges. 23% of VIOs report limited or no challenges.

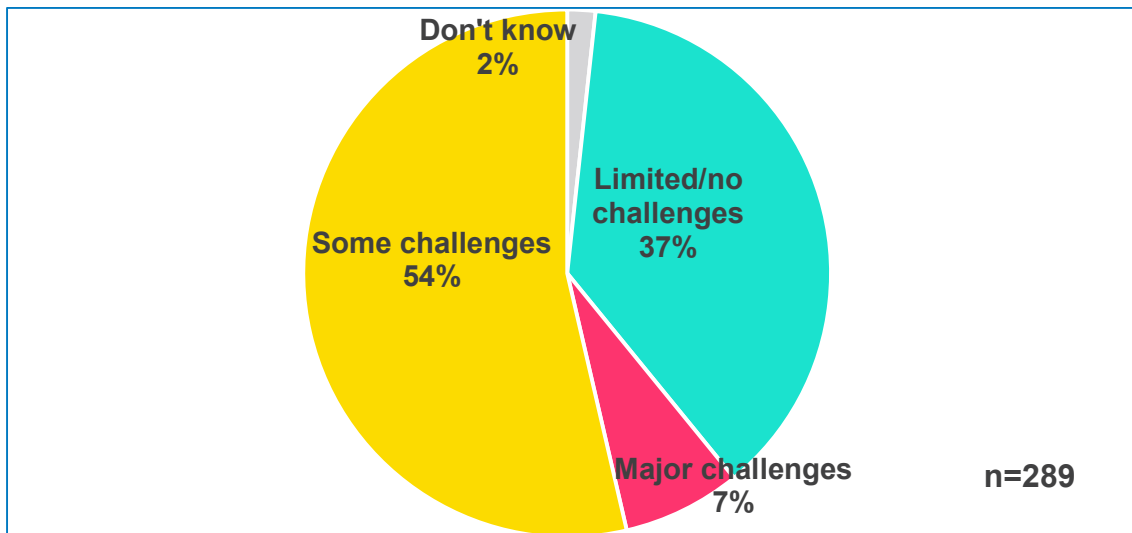
Q - Have you experienced any challenges in recruiting volunteers?



2.3 Volunteer retention

61% of VIOs are experiencing challenges with volunteer retention, for 7% these are major challenges. 37% of VIOs are experiencing limited or no challenges with volunteer retention.

Q - Have you experienced any challenges in retaining volunteers?

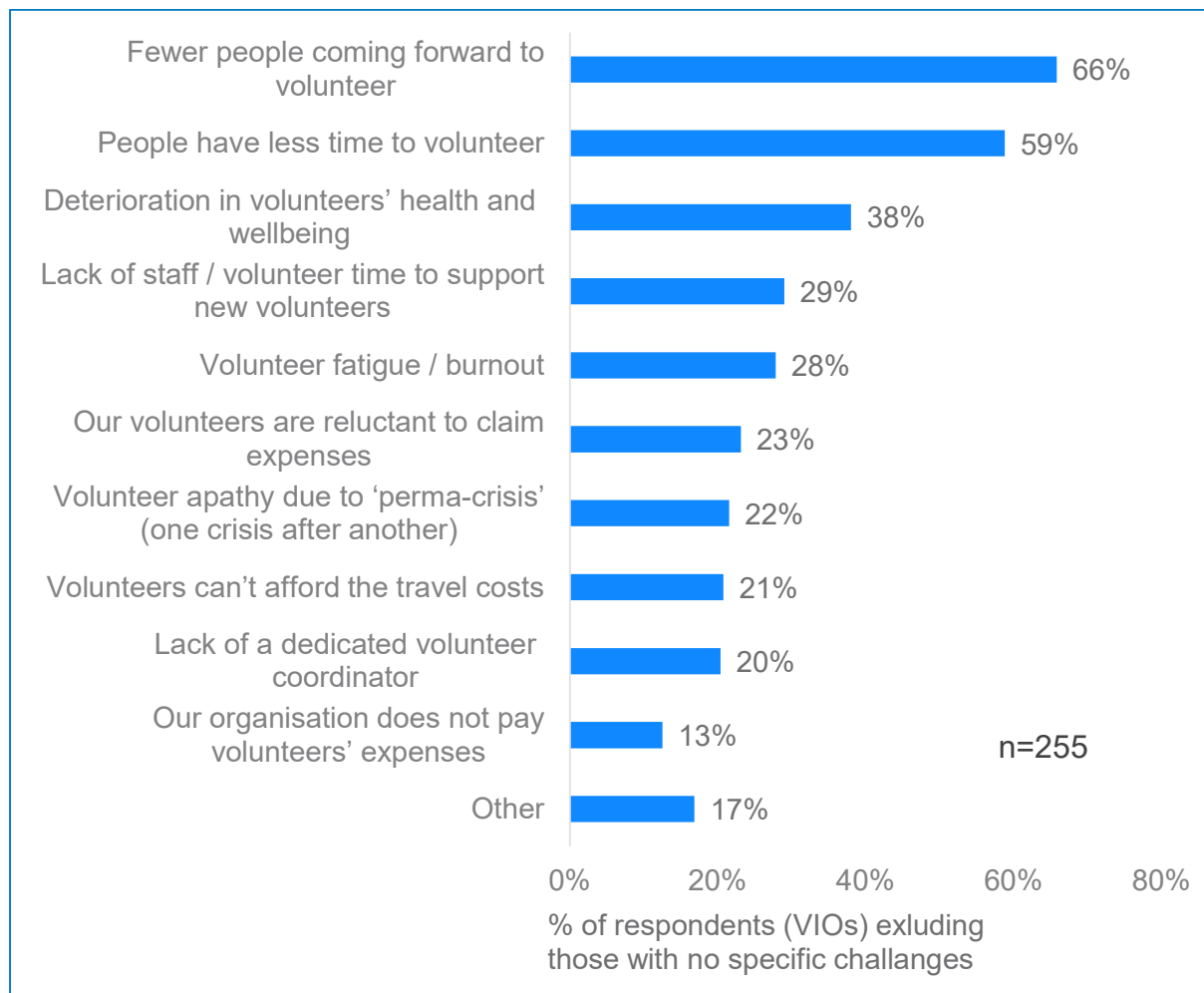


2.4 Specific challenges in recruitment and retention

'Fewer people coming forward to volunteer' (66%) and 'People have less time to volunteer' (59%) are specific challenges faced by the highest proportion of VIOs. The remaining challenges fall into three main groups:

- **Health and wellbeing challenges** from the cost-of-living crisis are highlighted by: 'Deterioration in volunteers' health and wellbeing' (38%); 'Volunteer fatigue / burnout' (28%); and 'Volunteer apathy due to perma-crisis' (22%).
- **Financial challenges** of the cost-of-living crisis are highlighted by: 'Our volunteers are reluctant to claim expenses' (23%); 'Volunteers can't afford the travel costs' (21%); and 'Our organisation does not pay volunteers' expenses' (13%).
- **Staffing challenges** through; a 'Lack of staff / volunteer time to support new volunteers' (29%); and a 'Lack of a dedicated volunteer coordinator' (20%).

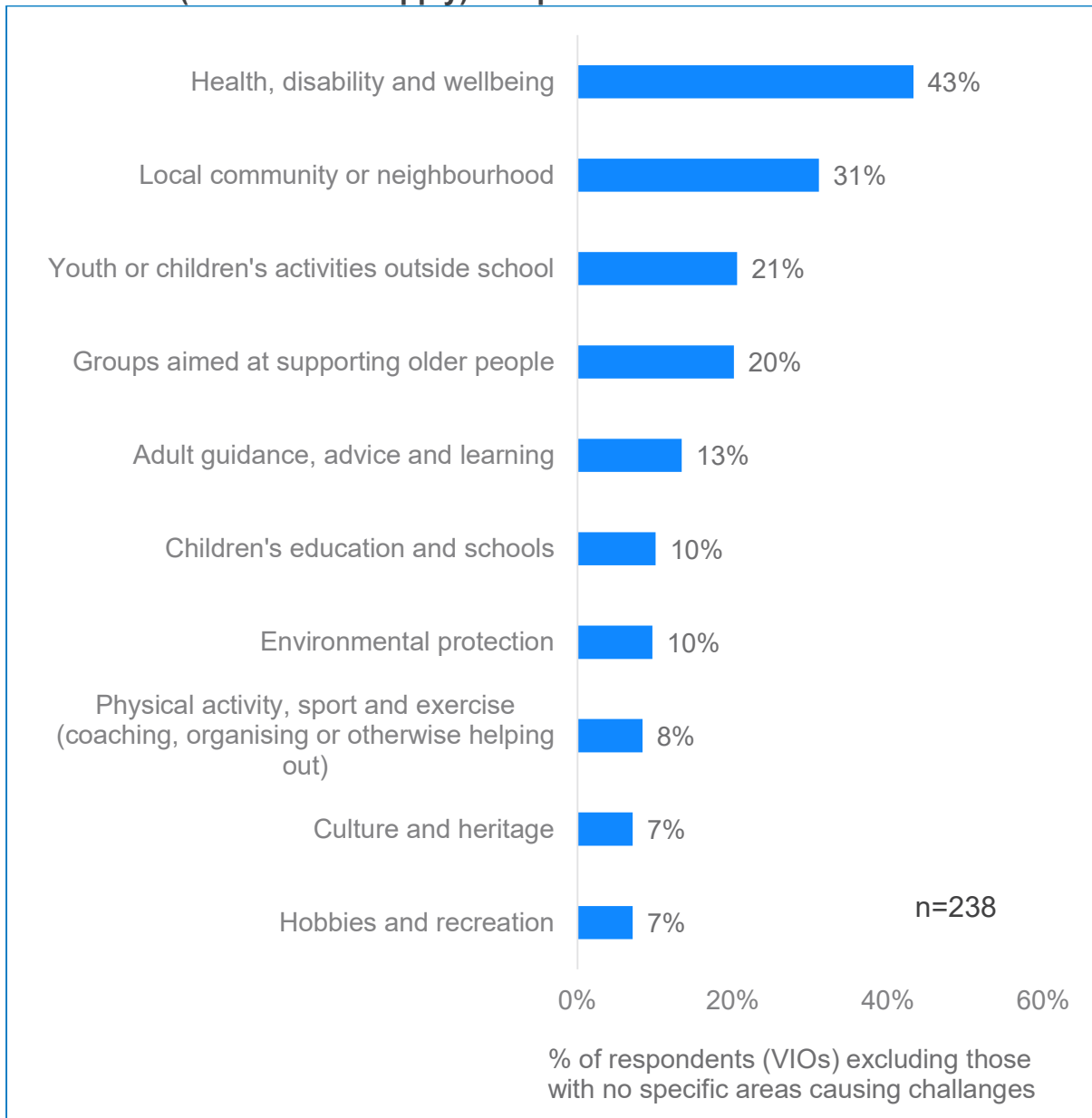
Q. What specific challenges has your organisation faced in the recruitment and/or retention of volunteers since January 2022? (select all that apply)



2.5 Volunteer recruitment issues by Area of operation

The highest proportion of VIOs reporting recruitment issues are in the areas of 'Health, disability and wellbeing' (43%); 'Local community or neighbourhood' (31%); 'Youth or children's activities outside school' (21%) and 'Groups aimed at supporting older people' (20%).

Q. Which of the following area(s) are you experiencing difficulties in recruiting volunteers? (Select all that apply) – Top 10



Outside of the top 10 areas of operation, VIOs are also reporting recruitment issues in 'Emergency services, first aid and public safety' (3%); 'Religion and belief' (3%); 'Trade Unions, justice and human rights' (2%); 'Animal welfare' (1%); and 'Politics' (1%).

2.6 Volunteer recruitment issues by Volunteer roles

Proportionally more VIOs are experiencing volunteer recruitment issues within the following roles: 'Generally helping out as required' (18%); 'Acting as a committee member or as a trustee' (17%); and 'Visiting, buddying or befriending' (13%).

Q. Are there any particular volunteer roles your organisation is experiencing difficulties in recruiting volunteers into?

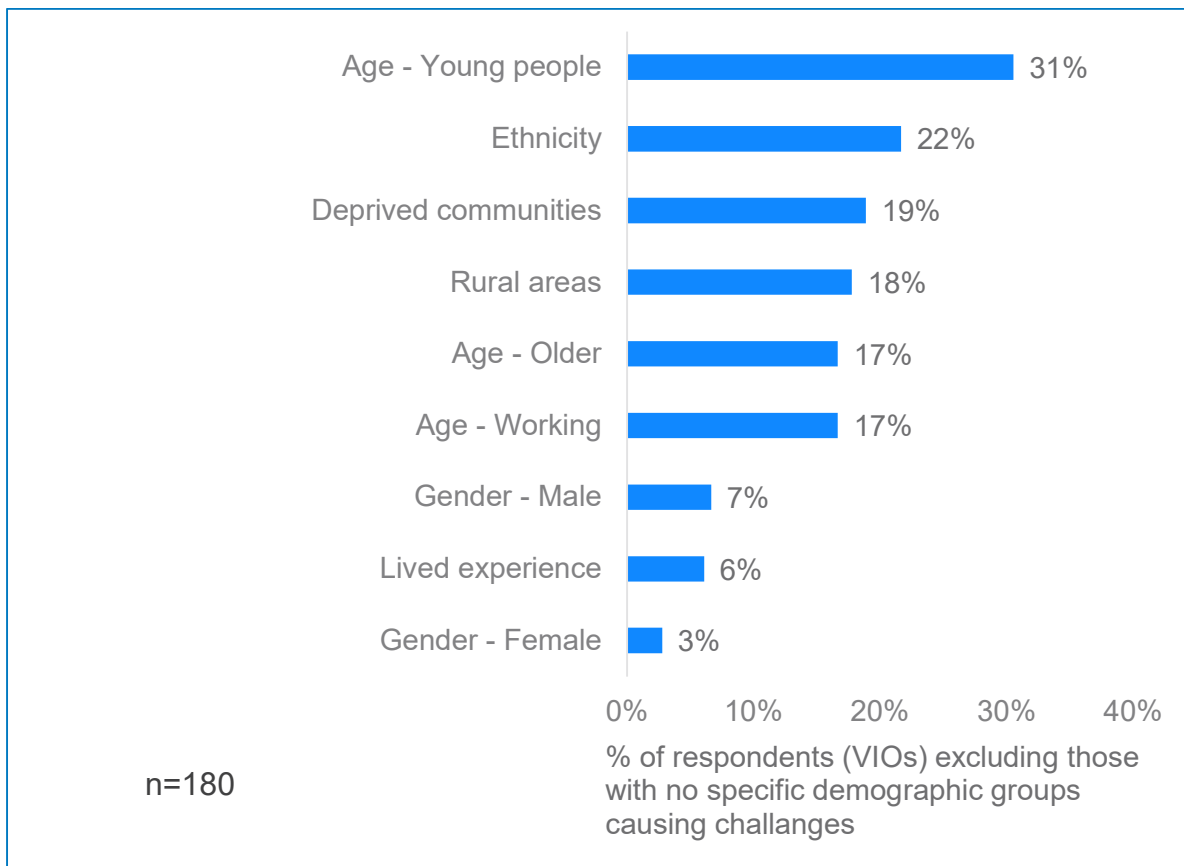


18% of VIOs selected 'Other' for roles not listed in the predefined selection criteria. Responses included a specific type of Volunteer Driver. Other respondents also stated that they experience issues across multiple roles.

2.7 Volunteer recruitment issues by Demographics

31% of VIOs are finding it harder to recruit young people to volunteer. VIOs are also finding it harder to recruit from ethnic minority groups (22%), 'Deprived communities' (19%), 'Rural areas' (18%), older age groups (17%) and working age groups (17%), 'Gender – male' (7%) and 'Gender – Female' (3%). Adults with 'Lived experience' (6%) were also cited by VIOs as being harder to recruit from.

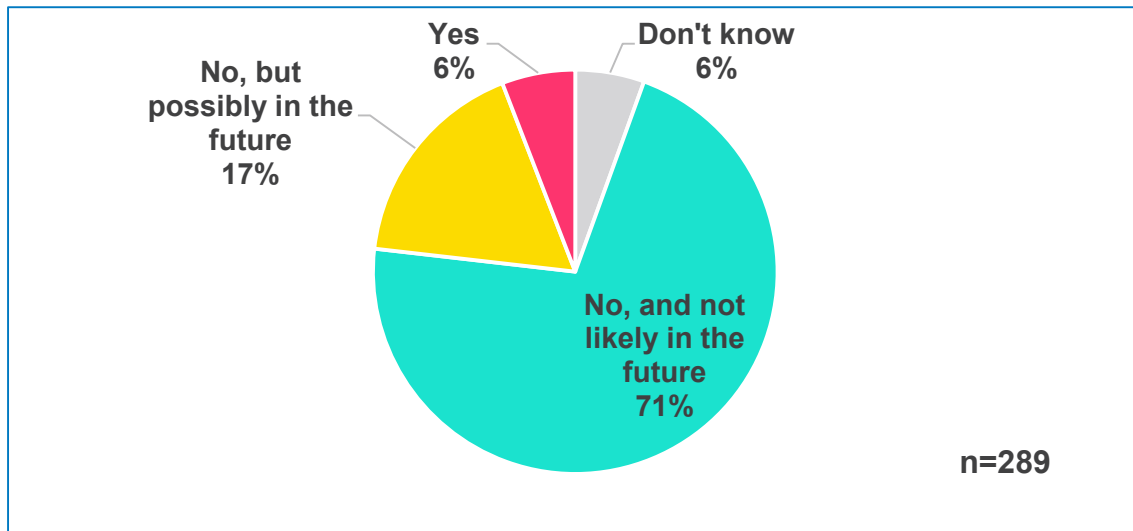
Q. Are there any particular demographic groups which are harder to recruit currently (volunteering less). For example, age groups, deprived communities, rural areas, ethnicity etc?



2.8 Replacement of volunteers with paid staff

Six percent of VIOs have been asked to replace roles or tasks of paid staff with volunteers, a further 17% have not been asked but possibly will in the future. 71% of VIOs have not been asked and are not likely to in the future.

Q. Has your organisation been asked to provide or to change volunteering roles which replace some or all of the work of paid staff, or to change / include tasks undertaken by paid staff?



2.9 Services to help with recruitment and retention.

VIOs provided ‘open text’ suggestions for services that could be offered to help with recruitment and retention – these have been coded below.

Volunteer recruitment resources:

- “support with recruitment and retention as staff time limited”
- “Help in recruiting”
- “Helping groups to link up with their local TSI groups to help recruit and share volunteer opportunities.....”

Volunteer support resources

- “...Volunteer support”
- “...Support for volunteer coordinators that have people who have English as a second language, additional support needs.”
- “...Advice on how to manage volunteers when it's not your only job - end up neglecting them sometimes”.

Q - What services do you think we could offer to help organisations with volunteer recruitment and retention?



‘Volunteer recruitment resources’ (25%) and ‘Volunteer support resources’ (23%) were cited by the highest proportion of VIOs. 18% referenced ‘Monetary support’ and 13% of VIOs referenced a ‘National Recruitment / Awareness campaign’.

2.10 Other impacts

VIOs provided other impacts of the cost-of-living crisis or successes they've experienced in recruiting volunteers through an 'open text' response – these were coded below.

33% of VIOs both highlighted examples of the impacts of rising costs on volunteers and 'Examples / actions implemented by VIOs' from the cost-of-living. VIOs shared examples such as recruitment success from attending TSI events or in recruiting volunteers from service beneficiaries.

Impacts of rising costs on volunteers:

"We have found a number of volunteers leaving volunteering or volunteering less as they can't afford not to work, including previously retired volunteers who have re-joined the workforce because they need an income to navigate the current cost of living."

"People have to work more and have less time"

"time and health effects of possible volunteers who fear benefits will be cut"

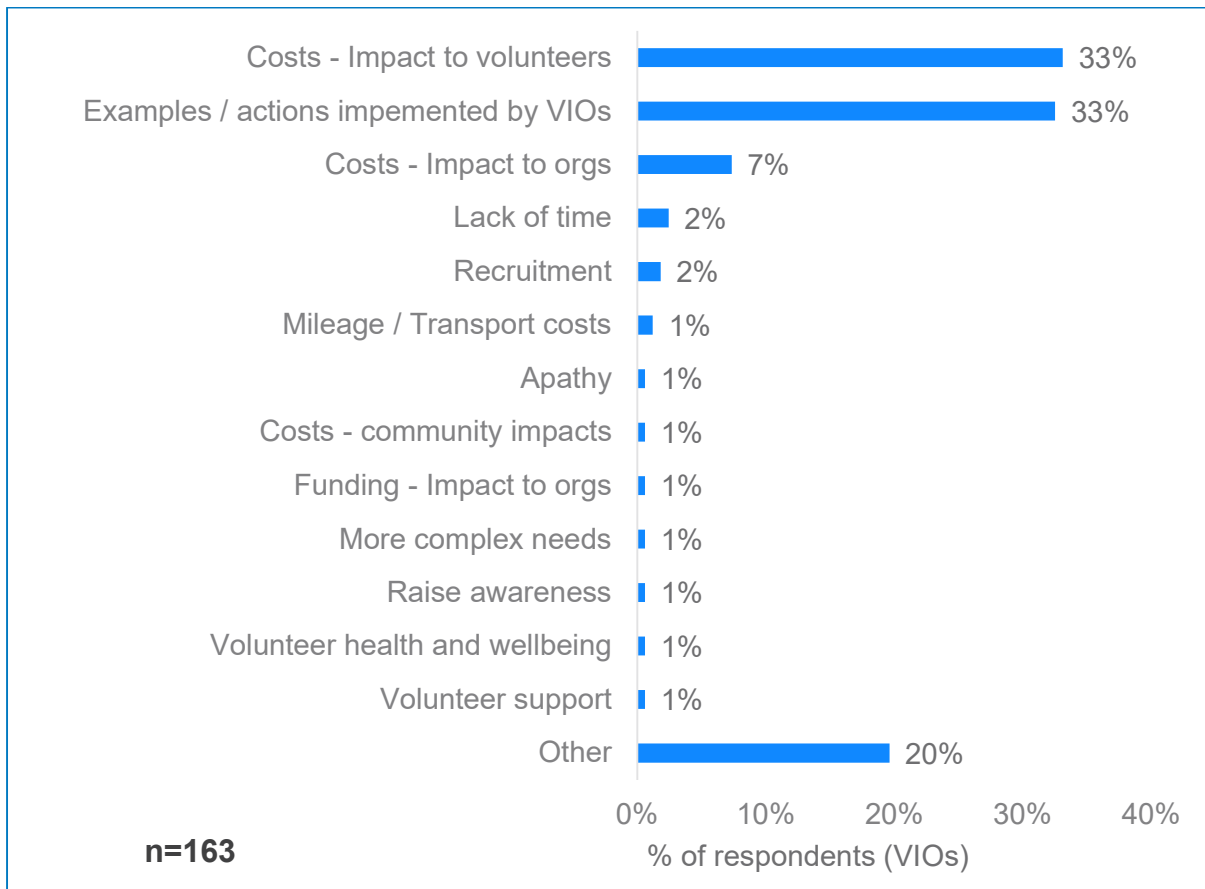
Examples / actions implemented by VIOs:

"By offering a lunch for some of our volunteers it means that they are able to have something to eat. Also providing travel expenses means that they are not out of pocket."

"Partnership working with other 3rd Sector organisations, Ensure we are providing opportunities to recognise and celebrate volunteering while being mindful of the current economic climate."

"With an increase in our food support provision we have seen an increase in people who have not known about us before, or been in our building. We have recruited two volunteers through this work.."

Q- Are there any other impacts of cost of living or successes you have experienced in recruiting volunteers that you would like to share?



3. Conclusions

In September 2022, Volunteer Scotland published its first research on the potential impacts of the cost of living crisis; [Testing our Resilience - the impact of the cost of living crisis on volunteering and volunteers](#). At this point evidence on the impacts to volunteers and volunteering was limited, with working hypotheses proposed.

Three cost of living bulletins were subsequently published which considered the impacts on volunteers (using the Scottish Government / You Gov [Public attitudes to coronavirus, cost of living and Ukraine: tracker – data tables](#)) and the impacts to volunteer involving organisations (using evidence from [The Scottish Third Sector Tracker](#)).

This evidence over a year highlights an increased demand for volunteers; fewer resources to manage and support volunteer programmes; volunteer shortages and recruitment challenges; and an adverse impact on volunteers' health and wellbeing. A working hypothesis was presented on the potential for role substitution as some organisations try to maintain service delivery / meet increasing demand in the face of increased costs / funding shortages.

While the evidence to date clearly showed that not all organisations were experiencing the impacts on volunteering from the cost-of-living crisis the same, until now there was uncertainty and possibly an evidence gap around where the need was.

This survey explores which volunteering roles; areas of operation; and demographic groups are being most affected by the cost-of-living crisis. There is also important feedback on the impact of job substitution. Importantly and for the first time, Volunteer Involving Organisations provide their views on the services required to help them deal with the impacts of this crisis and moreover to help recruit and retain volunteers.

This survey further reinforces our findings to date but provides valuable new insights. This data suggests recruitment support and guidance is needed above all. It also suggests that while a recruitment / awareness campaign would be welcomed it is relatively less important. The targeting of any campaign is clearly important.

The evidence from the survey will be further analysed by the Cost-of-living Crisis Task Group. The survey also points to areas for further research, for example the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on inclusive volunteering and barriers to volunteering within specific roles.

Thank you to all of the organisations who completed the survey and shared their views and experiences of the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on their volunteering.



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